THE SHAPE OF LENT AT THE CHURCH OF ST. MARY THE VIRGIN NEW YORK 2025

My turning, my conversion is to the crucified.
His cross is my glory; with it my brow is signed,
In it my mind rejoices, by it my life is directed,
And my death is made clear.

~ William of St. Thierry

It is a good strife to go as far as we can in pleasing of him who hath done so much for us.

~ George Herbert, *The Country Parson*

Lent isn't about being morbid or punitive, tearing ourselves down, or whipping ourselves into a lather of self-condemnation. It is, rather, about reality. It is about taking honest stock of who and what we are in the face of eternity and in the face of God. We are limited; we are fallible. In our short lives, we make choices that lead us deeper into separation and chaos — cutting ourselves off form those who love us and whom we would love. Lent is a deliberate exercise of owning up.

~ Derek Olsen, Inwardly Digest: The Prayer Book as Guide to a Spiritual Life

You can't conceive, my child, nor can I or anyone the appalling strangeness of the mercy of God.

~ Graham Greene, *Brighton Rock*

At Saint Mary's, we try to preserve the communal nature of Lenten practice as a parish family.

This booklet provides a description and schedule of what we will do together during this holy time.

Suggestions for additional Lenten reading may be found at the end of this booklet.

INTRODUCTION

Lent, the forty-day period between Ash Wednesday and Easter (Sundays are sometimes excepted), was historically a period of preparation for "catechumens," persons seeking baptism into the life of the church at Easter. Quite soon, however, it became and it continues to be a time of self-examination, penitence, and special devotion for all Christians as they prepare for the celebration of the Resurrection of Jesus.

Lent is more than just a season of fasting and abstinence; it is a positive opportunity for significant spiritual growth. The Orthodox theologian, Alexander Schmemann, describes Lent as "the school of repentance which alone will make it possible to receive Easter not as mere permission to eat, to drink, and to relax, but indeed as the end of the 'old' in us, as our entrance into the 'new' life we have in Jesus."

Lent, then, is rooted in an essential aspect of what it is to be a Christian: repentance, *metanoia* in Greek, turning one's life around, putting off the old self and putting on of the new self, which is made real by the Resurrection of Jesus. It is an intensification of that movement which should be the spiritual rhythm of our lives: a continuous turning away from sin and reorientation, through grace, toward God.

Lent is about *conversion*.

While we typically think of Lent as a time of fasting and self-denial, we should also approach it as an opportunity for the renewal of those things which form us as believers and strengthen our faith. When we become Christians, we assume a variety of spiritual disciplines so that we will better follow Jesus — we go to Mass, say our prayers, study the Bible and other spiritual classics, make a regular confession, and devote ourselves to good works and reaching out to serve others. During Lent, we should rededicate ourselves to these disciplines and

make them a bit more stringent as a means of restoring vibrancy, life, and passion to our relationship with God. In short, we are hoping to make our hearts and souls bigger, to create more space for God in our lives.

In Lent, we follow Jesus into the wilderness where he was tempted, and we attempt through spiritual discipline to resist temptation ourselves. We pray and proceed with Jesus on the way to Jerusalem and to his Cross on Good Friday. Throughout Lent we focus also on our own wilderness of temptation while keeping an eye toward the Resurrection.

Again from Fr. Schmemann, Lent is a time of "bright sadness." *Sadness*, because we focus on the passion and death of Jesus and on the sins of us all which brought him to the Cross. And *bright*, for the promise of Lent is the glory and joy of the Lord's Resurrection at Easter.

One aspect of Lent which is rarely mentioned today is the communal. In earlier times, Lent was a discipline taken on by an

community or even a whole society. It was something everyone did together, and the rhythm of life in society was adjusted to support this common discipline. Everyone supported everyone else in the Lenten discipline, and society was so ordered as to make this mutual support possible. One might think of this as a kind of spiritual teamwork, and like anything done as a team, it bound people together and helped create community.

In the twenty-first century world in which we live, this has been almost completely lost. Christianity, since the Reformation, has become a plurality of "christianities," not bound by common belief or practice. Society has become almost entirely secular, and the rhythm of contemporary life is most often counter to spiritual practice. The communal aspect of Lent has been lost. Or almost lost.

It is this communal aspect we aim to preserve at the Church of Saint Mary the Virgin.

A COLLECT FOR LENT

Almighty and everlasting God, you hate nothing you have made and forgive the sins of all who are penitent: Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of you, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen*.

THE SHAPE OF LENT

Weekly Fasts & Abstinence

Fasting and abstinence are linked with repentance in Sacred Scripture. When we fast, we are reminded spiritually and even physically of our weakness, our finitude, and our need for God. Each week, we will abstain from a particular pleasure or shortcoming. Some people choose to break that on Sundays, which are sometimes thought of as "feast" days in celebration of the Resurrection. Similarly, Fridays during Lent are days when Christians have traditionally abstained from meat, as these days are "little Good Fridays," which point toward the Friday of Holy Week.

You may choose to do each of the following suggested communal practices of abstinence for one week only; or you may let them build on each other, so that by the end of Lent you are doing all six weekly practices at the same time.

Daily Readings

During Lent we will read common Scriptures together. Read the Psalm for the week, then meditate on the scripture passage for the day, perhaps incorporating it into one of the forms for Morning or Evening Prayer found in the *Book of Common Prayer*. The theme of our readings will be food, particularly bread and wine. Our first parents ate "forbidden fruit," and their disobedience alienated them from God, from each other, and from the good earth. Disobedience came by eating, and by a terrible irony, food which should give life became the means of alienation. This Lent, think about how God brings proper and life-giving food, reversing the curse and making eating the means of communion with God.

Easter Vigil

Our Lenten journey together will culminate in the celebration of Jesus' Resurrection at the Great Vigil of Easter at 7:00 in the evening on Holy Saturday, April 19.

OUR JOURNEY

ASH WEDNESDAY

March 5 - 8

Fast on Ash Wednesday

Creation and Fall

WEEK 1

March 9 - 15

Abstinence: Sweets & Treats

Bread and Wine as Offerings and Signs of God's Presence

WEEK 2

March 16 - 22

Abstinence: Technology

Miracles of Bread and Wine

WEEK 3

March 23 - 29

Abstinence: Careless Talk & Profanity

The Passover

WEEK 4

March 30 - April 5

Abstinence: Alcohol or Coffee

Institution of the Eucharist

WEEK 5

April 6 - 12

Abstinence: Unnecessary Spending

Christ: Bread Given for the Life of the World

HOLY WEEK

April 13 - 19

Abstinence: Food or Meals

Traditional Readings

ASH WEDNESDAY

March 5 - 8

Psalm of the Week - 51

Thursday	Genesis 1.1-25
Friday	Genesis 1.26-2.3
Saturday	Genesis 3.1-24

The Ashes

Lent begins with the imposition of ashes as a sign of our mortality and penitence for our sins. As we receive the ashes, we hear the words *Remember, O man, that thou art dust, and unto dust thou shalt return* (Genesis 3.19). The ashes are imposed in the form of a cross, pointing to our great hope in the grace of God through the Cross of Christ

which grants us a sharing in the power of his Resurrection.

The Ash Wednesday Fast

Traditionally, the Church has fasted from all food on Ash Wednesday to remind us that our physical hunger for food points to our greater spiritual hunger for God. If you are unable to fast for the entire day, then consider fasting from dinner.

Reading: Creation & Fall

God creates man and woman in his image and places them in a garden where they will have fellowship with him and all they need. They are tempted, however, and they succumb and disobey God's one command. By disobedience, they alienate themselves from God and are expelled form the garden into the world where toil, frustration, and mortality will be their lot.

WEEK ONE

March 9 - 15

Psalm of the Week - 104

Monday	Genesis 18.1-14
Tuesday	Genesis 14.13-19
Wednesday	Leviticus 7.11-15
Thursday	Exodus 25.23-30
Friday	1 Kings 7.48-51
Saturday	Hebrews 7.1-4, 15-8.2

Abstinence: Sweets & Treats

This week, resolve to deny yourself any type of sweets or dessert. This could mean a latte in the morning or chocolate in the evening. As you do so, notice what happens inside when you are denied something you've become accustomed to or something you really want — even something as inconsequential as dessert or candy.

Reading: Offerings and Signs

Abraham greets three mysterious visitors with an offering of bread, as Melchizedek had blessed him and offered bread and wine. These elements were a ritual sacrifice, and they were signs of God's presence. Moses had manna put in the Ark of the Covenant, and Solomon built a table for the Bread of the Presence in the temple. These hint at the promise of Jesus, the Bread of Life, and the Sacrament of the Eucharist he left us.

WEEK TWO

March 16 - 22

Psalm of the Week - 132

Monday	1 Kings 17.8-16
Tuesday	2 Kings 4.38-44
Wednesday	Mark 8.1-10
Thursday	Matthew 15.29-39
Friday	John 6.1-15
Saturday	John 2.1-11

Abstinence: Technology

This week, forego usual entertainments. Turn off the TV, drive without the radio, cut back on the podcasts. Log off Instagram, Facebook, X, TikTok, and Substack. Try to check and respond only to necessary emails. How does it feel to increase the silence? Spend the time listening for God's voice.

Reading: Miracles - Bread & Wine

In the Ancient Near-East, life was sustained by bread. Other foods were seasonal and usually expensive. Bread miracles are about restoring vitality to those who hunger and have no food. Elijah helps a widow and her son survive. Elisha feeds his fellows in a famine. Jesus feeds the crowds with bread. Life, though, is more than just surviving — Jesus brings wine, the symbol of joy, happiness, and the fellowship of celebration.

WEEK THREE

March 23 - 29

Psalm of the Week - 78

Monday	Exodus 12.14-28
Tuesday	Exodus 16.4-21
Wednesday	Exodus 13.3-10
Thursday	Joshua 5.6-12
Friday	Luke 22.7-23
Saturday	1 Corinthians 5.6-8

Fast: Careless Talk & Profanity

"If any one thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this man's religion is vain." (James 1.26) This week abstain from carelessness in your speech. How easy it is to repeat gossip, to delight in malicious talk, to speak out in anger and wound others with words, to take God's name in vain. Notice how habitual this talk becomes and resolve to curb it.

Reading: The Passover

Moses instituted seven special meals to commemorate God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt. They ate unleavened bread to signify they left in haste. He commanded a lamb be butchered and its blood smeared on the lintels of their houses. The Passover points to God's action to sustain and provide for his people in time of need, and to the Lamb of God, who takes away our sin.

WEEK FOUR

March 30 - April 5

Psalm of the Week - 116

Monday	1 Corinthians 11.23-32
Tuesday	1 Corinthians 10.14-21
Wednesday	Mark 14.1-25
Thursday	Matthew 26.6-29
Friday	Luke 22.1-23
Saturday	John 13.1-17

Abstinence: Alcohol or Coffee

Choose either coffee or alcohol (or both) and refrain from drinking it this week. If neither is something you regularly enjoy, choose another "staple" in your diet. Pay attention to what happens when you thirst for something you routinely enjoy. Try to pray when you have the desire for the thing from which you are abstaining.

Reading: The Eucharist

The first report we have of Jesus' institution of the Eucharist is from St. Paul's first letter to the church in Corinth. It signifies the New Covenant God made with all nations, gathering them all into one body at one table, anticipating the second coming of Jesus to renew the whole creation. The Gospel accounts, composed later and each with its own emphasis, give detailed narratives of Jesus' last supper with his disciples.

WEEK FIVE

April 6 - 12

Psalm of the Week - 132

Monday	Luke 24.13-35
Tuesday	John 21.4-14
Wednesday	John 6.32-48
Thursday	John 6.49-51
Friday	John 6.52-59
Saturday	Revelation 19.6-9a

Fast: Unnecessary Spending

This week, resolve to spend nothing on yourself except what is absolutely necessary. Buy no new clothes or gadgets, books or music. Resist the impulse buying that is so easy and instant on the Internet. Eat cheaply and save money. Practice living simply and consider giving away the money you save.

Reading: Christ, Bread Given for the Life of the World

After the Resurrection, Jesus appears twice at meals. “He was made known to them in the breaking of bread,” but more than that, the risen Jesus nourishes his people in the Eucharist with his own body and blood. The Eucharist is more than symbol. It is the reality of Jesus’ presence with his people, nourishing them with his risen life. “The bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

HOLY WEEK

April 13 - 19

Psalm of the Week - 31

Monday	John 12.9-19
Tuesday	John 12.20-26
Wednesday	John 12.27-36
Maundy Thursday	John 17
Good Friday	John 13.36-38
Holy Saturday	Hebrews 4
Easter Day	John 1.1-18

Fast: Food or Meals

Pick a type of food (like meat or carbs or even all "solids") and fast from it for the week, or pick a meal to skip entirely on a daily basis. If you skip meals, spend the time you would have spent preparing and eating food to pray, read the Bible or some spiritual classic, or serve others.

Reading: The Traditional Lections

The Bible is a single narrative from beginning to end. Fall, separation, and God's great project to repair the rift between us. From the first promises in Genesis, through the prophets, and in the Life of Jesus, God has been at work. At the cross, Jesus finishes his labor. Enter Holy Week with the traditional Office readings that trace the climactic events of the Week of Salvation.

LENTEN OBSERVANCES AT SAINT MARY'S

ASH WEDNESDAY

March 5

Said Mass with Imposition of Ashes - 8:00 a.m.

Sung Mass with Imposition of Ashes - 12:10 p.m.

Solemn Mass with Imposition of Ashes - 6:00 p.m.

Ashes will be imposed for visitors throughout the day in the Mercy Chapel, but attendance at a Mass is strongly recommended for all Saint Marians

STATIONS of the CROSS

Fridays at 6:00 p.m. following

Evening Prayer at 5:30 p.m.

ADULT FORMATION IN LENT

Sundays at 9:45 a.m.

Led by Fr. Pete Powell

* * *

Wednesdays at 6:45 p.m.

Led by Fr. Stephen Morris

LENTEN QUIET DAY

Saturday March 15 from 9:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Led by Fr. Matt Jacobson

To sign up, contact mjacobson@stmvnyc.org

CONFESSIONS

Every Saturday 11:00 a.m.,

after the Good Friday Liturgy, or by appointment

PALM SUNDAY

April 13

Said Mass at 9:00 a.m.

Solemn Mass with Procession at 11:00 a.m.

THE SACRED TRIDUUM

Maundy Thursday Liturgy

April 17 at 6:00 p.m.

Watch Before the Blessed Sacrament

8:00 p.m. to Midnight on Maundy Thursday

9:00 a.m to Noon on Good Friday

Good Friday Liturgy

April 18 at 12:30 p.m.

The Holy Saturday Liturgy

April 19 at 9:00 a.m.

The Great Vigil of Easter

April 19 at 7:00 p.m.

EASTER DAY // APRIL 20

Said Mass with Hymns — 9:00 a.m.

Solemn Mass with Procession — 11:00 a.m.

RECOMMENDED READING

Pope Benedict XVI, *Journey to Easter: Spiritual Reflection for the Lenten Season*.

Bread and Wine: Readings for Lent and Easter.

Stanley Hauerwas, *Cross-Shattered Christ: Meditations on the Seven Last Words*.

Wesley Hill, *Easter: The Season of the Resurrection of Jesus*.

Fleming Rutledge, *The Crucifixion: Understanding the Death of Jesus Christ*.

Fleming Rutledge, *The Seven Last Words from the Cross*.

Alexander Schmemann, *Great Lent: Journey to Pascha*.

Samuel Wells, *Power & Passion: Six Characters in Search of Resurrection*.

William H. Willimon, *Thank God It's Friday: Encountering the Seven Last Words from the Cross*.

N.T. Wright, *Christians at the Cross: Finding Hope in the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus*.

N.T. Wright, *The Scriptures, the Cross & the Power of God: Reflections for Holy Week*.

PLEDGE

I, _____,
pledge to join with fellow parishioners in taking upon myself the Corporate Lenten Discipline described in *The Shape of Lent at the Church of Saint Mary the Virgin 2025*. This involves fasting and abstinence, daily worship, meditation, and the study of Holy Scripture. I pray that the Grace of God will enable me and those others who have taken on this discipline to grow spiritually and to be bound closer to God and to one another in the fellowship of Christ's Body at Saint Mary's.

To Access this Booklet Online:

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